

City of Northampton, MA  
Transportation and Parking Commission

August 19, 2020

MEETING MINUTES

Submitted by: Beth A. Kaplowitt

1. DPW Director Donna LaScaleia called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m. and announced that there would be audio/video recording of this virtual meeting.

**Members present and absent/introductions:**

Member	Present	Time if arriving late or leaving early
Donna LaScaleia, DPW Director, Chair	X	
Jody Kasper, Chief of Police, Vice Chair	X	
Wayne Feiden, Director of Planning and Sustainability	X	
Nanci Forrestall, Parking Enforcement Administrator	X	
Jim Nash, City Council Vice President	X	
Karen Foster, Ward 2 City Councilor	X	
Debin Bruce, Citizen	X	
Gary Hartwell, Citizen	Absent	
Adam Novitt, Citizen	Absent	
Jami Albro-Fisher, Citizen	X	
Advisor	Present	Time if arriving late or leaving early
Maggie Chan, DPW Traffic Engineer	X	
Staff	Present	Time if arriving late or leaving early
Beth A. Kaplowitt, DPW Clerk	X	

**2. Public comment**

- Fred Zimnoch, who lives in the Pomeroy Terrace Historic District requested hard copies of the annual Traffic Safety Report for 2019 and 2018.

**3. Approval of minutes from the previous meeting**

- A motion was proposed and seconded and a roll call vote was taken.

Motion:	Motion by:	Second:	Vote:
To approve the minutes from the January 21, 2020 meeting.	Jim Nash	Debin Bruce	Yes, 7 No, 0 Abstain, 1

#### **4. Reports from departments and subcommittees/announcements/presentations**

- Department of Planning and Sustainability – Director Wayne Feiden:
  - Tomorrow is the big install for the Main Street narrowing project. The Department of Planning & Sustainability, the Mayor and the DPW have all been involved – it is part of the COVID recovery plan for the City;
  - They just signed a contract today for the new Edwards Square on-ramp to the bike path, so that project should be starting soon;
  - They are almost done with the wheelchair ramps all over the City;
  - They just got an Engineer assigned from MassDOT, so the contract for the Bridge Street School Safer Schools project can now be forwarded on to Design.
- Department of Public Works (DPW) - Director Donna LaScaleia
  - Street Sweeping
    - ❖ Sweeping is currently underway in Ward 3;
    - ❖ Only Wards 1 & 2 remain to be done.
  - Paving Projects
    - ❖ Bratton Court off Main Street in Florence is being repaved. This is related to the sewer reconstruction completed by Geeleher Enterprises, Incorporated;
    - ❖ North Farms Road is being paved from the Williamsburg Town line to Mountain Street and North Maple Street from Mountain Street to Bridge Road. This is a two mile long, \$2 million project;
  - Other Projects
    - ❖ Structural repairs are being made to the west end of the Pine Street bridge;
    - ❖ In the fall, various streets throughout the City will be crack sealed. This process seals cracks in the surface of the road in order to preserve the pavement condition;
    - ❖ Within the next month, all pavement markings in the City will be re-stripped. This includes repainting yellow center lines, white lines, crosswalk markings, railroad markings and speed hump markings. The contractor will be doing the work between midnight and 5:00 p.m.

#### **5. Matters before the Commission**

Agenda items b. and c. were switched on the Agenda by Chair LaScaleia.

- a. Parking restrictions in certain areas of Leeds: Main Street, Mulberry Street, et al
  - Director LaScaleia said that this is a complex situation with many stakeholders. The TPC will not be making a decision on this matter today. She then summarized the current conditions and the history of the problem:
    - ❖ There has been an influx of seasonal traffic recreating in the Mill River;
    - ❖ The streets can't handle the numbers of cars, pedestrians and bicycles;
    - ❖ After consulting with the Parking Department, the Police Department, City Councilors and others, the DPW posted temporary "No Parking" signs on one side of Main Street, on Mulberry Street, and on both sides of Grove Avenue and Front Street. The signage clarified the parking regulations to assist with parking enforcement and to allow safe traffic flow;
    - ❖ Many comments have been received since the signs were erected;
    - ❖ Some of the challenges involved: Cars are parking on both sides of the street, which does not leave sufficient street width for two way traffic, pedestrians, and bicycles. A travel lane requires 11 feet of width in each direction, and parking on the side of the street requires 8 feet of width on each side of the street. So, two way traffic and

parking on both sides of the street requires the width of the travel way to be a minimum of 38 feet. Main Street does not meet the width requirements for parking on both sides of the street;

- ❖ The streets cannot support the required amount of traffic and parking volume;
  - ❖ Access for emergency vehicles must be maintained at all times;
  - ❖ Main Street is 3,000 feet long, and it varies from 20 feet wide to 38 feet wide. Grove Avenue is 1,260 feet long and 20 feet wide, so it can't even support two way traffic, much less parking. Mulberry Street is 830 feet long and 29 feet wide. There is no parking on either side of Mulberry Street, but it was not signed. Florence Street is 3,600 feet long from where it comes off of Haydenville Road, and 30 feet wide. It has multiple no-parking areas already;
  - ❖ In the immediate neighborhood, Evergreen Road is 22 feet wide, River Road is 27 feet wide and Water Street starts at 24 feet wide and narrows to 16 feet wide at the dead end;
  - ❖ In addition to the inability of the area to support two way traffic, parking and emergency vehicle access due to the measurements shown above, there are general City-wide prohibitions regarding parking near crosswalks, bridge approaches, fire hydrants and driveways that must be included in the process;
  - ❖ Some options to consider are:
    - Restrict parking on one or both sides of a street
    - Seasonal parking limitations
    - Saturday/Sunday parking limitations
    - Resident-only parking
  - ❖ We cannot go through another summer where we have to take emergency action to address emergency vehicle access.
- Jason Johnson, Vice President of the Leeds Civic Association (LCA) described the responses received to a survey that the LCA distributed to some residents in the affected areas which asked if respondents would support "Resident Only" parking on certain streets. He said that there was a four to one consensus that something needed to be done in summer;
  - Ward 7 Councilor Rachel Maiore said that she and Director LaScaleia have had multiple conversations about the topic. She came tonight to listen and hopes that a consensus can be reached that would apply the broadest stroke possible to the situation;
  - Director LaScaleia asked that members of the public who wish to speak limit their comments to a maximum of three minutes, and that they state their name and address for the record.
  - Emmaline Meisner of 185 Main Street said that she has no off street parking available where she lives and so does not support resident-only parking and that she has been alarmed by unmasked crowds of people in the area;
  - Penny Geis of 1 Florence Street appreciates the temporary signs, and has concerns about the ability to find a solution. She is aware of four households who are thinking of leaving the area because of the problems;
  - Valerie Reiss said that she never received the parking survey and wants to look for other solutions that might have fewer unintended consequences for people of color (POC) who wish to access the area. She does not want the neighborhood to become elitist and over policed;
  - Timothy Recuber of 60 Chestnut Avenue Extension questions why the discussion is focused on traffic issues now when it began with noise, trash & music concerns. He did not receive a

- survey and is concerned that the neighborhood might be sending a message about keeping certain people out, which is out of step with the character of the neighborhood;
- Director LaScaleia gave a brief history of parking problems on Grove Avenue which first arose in the summer of 2015. She stressed that the job of the DPW is to ensure safe passage for pedestrians and vehicles. They also need to consider what the consequences might be if action is taken in one area – will the problem just be pushed to another area?
  - Jody Lacroff of 191 Main Street agrees with Timothy Recuber. She asked what percentage of the community actually received the survey and was it really reflective of the residents who live there. She also said that police and parking enforcement patrols of the area need to happen when traffic is heavy, rather than early in the morning;
  - Jason Johnson said that the survey was generated in response to traffic problems on Memorial Day. The LCA made an honest effort to get the survey to as many Main Street residents as possible;
  - Kristin Pisano of 237 Main Street Apartment 4 said that she questions the validity of the survey and would like to see alternative traffic calming measures be considered;
  - Alice McKusick of 17 Villone Drive said that she feels that everyone in Leeds should be surveyed. She thinks that the current parking restrictions give visitors the impression that they should not come here. She would like to see the possibility of buses or parking in school parking lots be considered as other options;
  - Norma Adler of 71 Chestnut Avenue wants to know who received the surveys, because it is clear that many people were left out. She also feels that the survey was flawed;
  - Ruth Ever of 17 Chestnut Avenue said that parking restriction are needed to address safety concerns. She feels that there are bigger issues to be considered such as how the needs of the community can be met while also considering the environmental impact of use (such as trash) on the river;
  - Director LaScaleia commented that the DPW does not like to make decisions in a vacuum. She said that the DPW could suggest that a series of Ordinances be put forward to restrict parking 365 days/year. Residents could be polled regarding their opinion about going to a permit-to-park system, and what prohibitions they would like to see. The City must do something, and if the residents do not clarify what they want, the DPW can make a decision. Also, the Mayor has been talking to various department heads about developing strategies regarding the bigger picture;
  - Director Feiden said that the Department of Planning and Sustainability has been looking at possible longer term options for the five informal/formal swimming areas in the City. It is possible that some improvements could be made to all of them, or major improvements could be made to one or two of them. They need to have Engineering input in order to look further into options;
  - Ray Sylvester of 41 Chestnut Avenue said that he appreciates the complexity of the issues and he knows that designing a survey that can get useful results is very difficult. He does not want to see the neighborhood of mostly white residents put out a message to Latino and Black families that they are not welcome;
  - Bucky Sparkle of Grove Avenue said that he does not want to see people turned away, but he does wish that visitors were more respectful. He is also concerned that guests of residents cannot find a place to park when they come to attend events such as birthday parties;
  - Lisa Baskin of 395 Audubon Road asked who designed the survey. She finds the survey pointed and negative and feels that it has a point of view that she finds offensive;
  - Jason Johnson said that the survey was designed by a small group of citizens who live in the vicinity of the dam, and that it is not a LCA project;

- Heather Bell of 231 Main Street said that neither traffic, parking nor trash issues are new problems in the area - they are just worse this summer. She does not think that resident-only parking is a good solution – she would like to see some type of seasonal and/or hourly based parking solution;
- Chris Sekaer of 26 Grove Avenue questioned the validity of the survey. He does feel that that the parking regulations have eased the traffic and he is in favor of limiting the number of cars in some way. He is most concerned about the crowds and the noise, trash and sewer issues that arise from them;
- Seana Lamothe of 183 Main Street said that there are economic issues involved here as well. There are twice as many cars as there are units at 183 Main Street, and the residents can neither afford to live somewhere else nor pay when their cars are towed because they have no place to park when there are many visitors on a hot summer day;
- Erin Mahon-Moore of 163 Main Street said that the survey was designed to garner enough signatures to begin the process, which has happened. Although the area is for all to enjoy, she feels that parking problems and safety on Main Street must be addressed and she does want residential parking on Main Street;
- Mike Macdonald of 220 Main Street said he sympathizes with those who want the community to be a welcoming one, but both sides of Main Street have safety problems. He has often been unable to safely exit his driveway;
- Ward 7 Councilor Rachel Maiori asked if there could be alternative or complementary traffic calming measures instituted, such as crosswalks;
- Director LaScaleia commented that alternative traffic calming measures such as speed humps are very controversial. They are effective, but people either love them or hate them. The TPC's role is to deal with issues such as streets that are too narrow or have too little parking, but issues regarding the overuse of the river is not within TPC jurisdiction;
- Director LaScaleia said that this was meant to be an informational meeting to determine a clear path forward. She reminded everyone that the major problem areas are Grove Avenue and Main Street, and said that she is committed to working with the LCA and Councilor Maiori to engage everyone who should be represented in the process and to work toward the goal of establishing some level of consensus. The conversation will continue over the coming weeks and months. There can be no action taken until the TPC approves any appropriate Ordinance, which then goes to City Council and from there to a Committee and then back to City Council;
- Chief Kasper requested that options be clearly laid out for the TPC before they are presented to the LCA and Councilor Maiori, and Director LaScaleia said that she would do that based on the Engineering information. She also said that the current parking bans will likely stay in place to the end of the summer recreation season.

b. Annual Traffic Safety Report by Chief Kasper

- A motion was proposed and seconded and a roll call vote was taken. There was no discussion.

Motion:	Motion by:	Second:	Vote:
To postpone the Annual Traffic Safety Report to a future meeting.	Jami Albro-Fisher	Jody Kasper	Yes, 8 No, 0 Abstain, 0

c. Proposed 20.015 An Ordinance Relative to Metered Parking on Pleasant Street

- Director LaScaleia summarized the history of the Ordinance. The Ordinance came to the TPC, who sent it to City Council, who then sent it back to the TPC after amending it. It eliminates two parking spaces on Millbank Place in order to improve the visibility issues;
- Director LaScaleia read the Ordinance into the record;
- A motion was proposed and seconded and a roll call vote was taken.

Motion:	Motion by:	Second:	Vote:
To send 20.015 An Ordinance Relative to Metered Parking on Pleasant Street to City Council with a positive recommendation.	Jim Nash	Jami Albro-Fisher	Yes, 7 No, 0 Abstain, 1

d. Proposed Ordinance Relative to Parking on Middle Street

- Director LaScaleia summarized the history of the Ordinance. The Ordinance came to the TPC from Ward 5 Councilor Alex Jarrett, who is concerned about visibility on Chestnut Street, especially in winter. The Ordinance would eliminate three parking spaces on Middle Street in order to improve sightline issues;
- Director LaScaleia read the Ordinance into the record;
- There was a discussion regarding the concerns expressed by the residents of Middle and Chestnut Streets, the number of spaces to be eliminated and whether some spaces should have two hour parking limits rather than be eliminated;
- A motion was proposed and seconded and a roll call vote was taken.

Motion:	Motion by:	Second:	Vote:
To send 20.XXX An Ordinance Relative to Parking on Middle Street to City Council with a positive recommendation.	Jody Kasper	Jim Nash	Yes, 8 No, 0 Abstain, 0

**6. New Business**

- None.

**7. Adjourned at 6:17 p.m.**

- A motion was proposed and seconded and a roll call vote was taken.

Motion	Motion by:	Second:	Vote:
Adjourn.	Jim Nash	Karen Foster	Yes, 8 No, 0 Abstain, 0